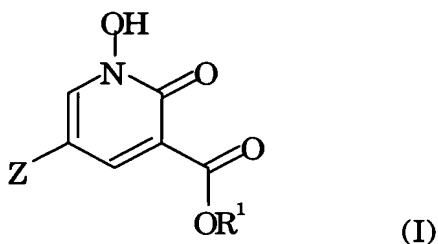


**Claims**

1. A compound of formula (I), or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:



wherein

Z represents C<sub>2-6</sub> alkynyl, aryl or heteroaryl, any of which groups may be optionally substituted; and

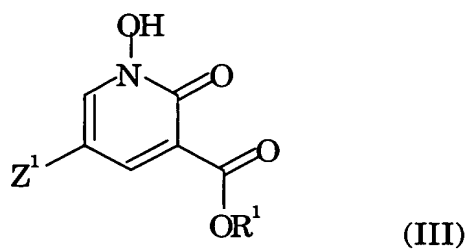
R<sup>1</sup> represents hydrogen, C<sub>1-6</sub> alkyl, C<sub>3-7</sub> heterocycloalkyl(C<sub>1-6</sub>)alkyl, di(C<sub>1-6</sub>)alkylamino(C<sub>1-6</sub>)alkyl, C<sub>2-6</sub> alkylcarbonyloxy(C<sub>1-6</sub>)alkyl or C<sub>3-7</sub> cycloalkoxycarbonyloxy(C<sub>1-6</sub>)alkyl.

2. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 wherein Z represents optionally substituted C<sub>2-6</sub> alkynyl.

3. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 wherein Z represents an optionally substituted aryl or heteroaryl moiety.

4. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 3 wherein R<sup>1</sup> is hydrogen, methyl, ethyl, morpholinylethyl, dimethylaminoethyl, acetoxymethyl, pivaloyloxymethyl or 1-(cyclohexyloxycarbonyloxy)ethyl.

5. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 of formula (III):

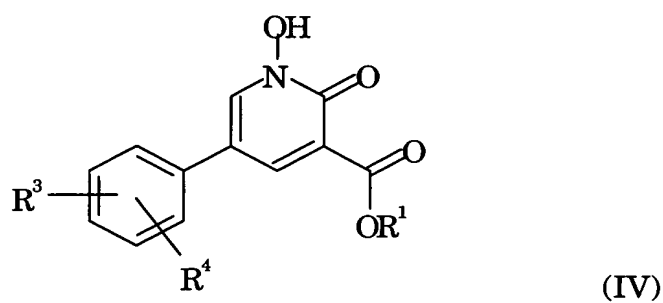


wherein

Z¹ represents optionally substituted aryl; and

5 R¹ is as defined in Claim 1.

6. A compound according to claim 5 of formula (IV):



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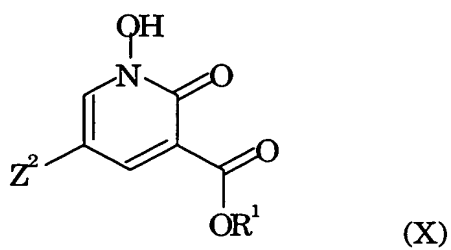
wherein

R¹ is as defined in Claim 5; and

each of R³ and R⁴ may independently be selected from H or a  
substituent group.

15

7. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 of formula (X):

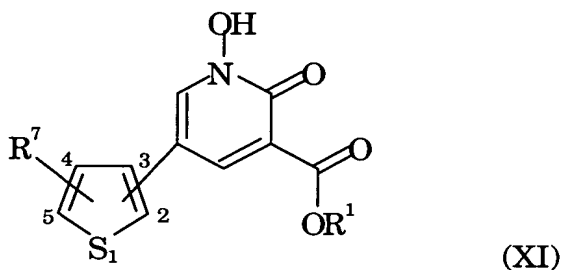


20

wherein

$Z^2$  represents optionally substituted heteroaryl; and  
 $R^1$  is as defined in Claim 1.

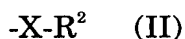
8. A compound as claimed in Claim 7 of formula (XI) below:



wherein

$R^1$  is as defined in Claim 7; and

$R^7$  is selected from halogen, hydroxy,  $-NO_2$ ,  $-NH_2$ , formyl,  $C_{2-6}$  alkylcarbonyl,  $-CO_2H$ ,  $C_{2-6}$  alkoxy,  $C_{1-6}$  alkyl,  $C_{1-6}$  alkenyl,  $C_{2-6}$  alkynyl,  $-CN$ ,  $C_{1-6}$  alkoxy,  $C_{1-6}$  alkylthio,  $C_{1-6}$  alkylsulfinyl,  $C_{1-6}$  alkylsulfonyl or a group of the formula (II):



where X is a linkage group and  $R^2$  is a relatively hydrophobic group.

9. A compound as claimed in Claim 1 selected from:

1-hydroxy-2-oxo-5-phenyl-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,

1-hydroxy-5-{3-[[[1-(1-naphthyl)ethyl]amino]carbonyl]amino}phenyl}-2-

20 oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,

5-(3-[[[5-bromothiophen-2-yl]carbonyl]amino]phenyl)-1-hydroxy-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,

5-[2-[[[2-chlorobenzyl]amino]carbonyl]amino]phenyl]-1-hydroxy-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid,

25 1-hydroxy-5-(2-nitrophenyl)-2-oxo-1,2-dihydropyridine-3-carboxylic acid;  
 or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

10. A compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9, or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, for use in therapy.

5 11. The use of a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9, or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, for the manufacture of a medicament for treatment or prevention of infection by hepatitis C virus in a human or animal.

10 12. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9, or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in association with a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.

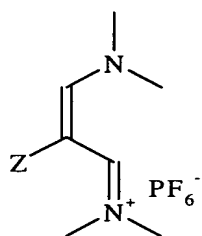
15 13. The pharmaceutical composition as claimed in Claim 12 which further comprises one or more other agents for the treatment of viral infections such as an antiviral agent, or an immunomodulatory agent such as  $\alpha$ -,  $\beta$ - or  $\gamma$ -interferon.

20 14. A method of inhibiting hepatitis C virus polymerase and/or of treating or preventing an illness due to hepatitis C virus, the method involving administering to a human or animal (preferably mammalian) subject suffering from the condition a therapeutically or prophylactically effective amount of the pharmaceutical composition claimed in Claim 12 or Claim 13 or of a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9, or a  
25 tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

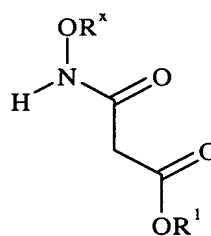
30 15. A method of preparation of a pharmaceutical composition, involving admixing at least one compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9, or a tautomer thereof, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, with one or more pharmaceutically acceptable adjuvants, diluents or carriers and/or with one or more other therapeutically or prophylactically active agents.

16. A process to prepare a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9 which comprises reacting a compound of formula (XIV) with a compound of formula (XV):

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(XIV)

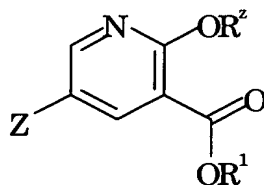


(XV)

wherein Z and R<sup>1</sup> are as defined in Claim 1, and R<sup>x</sup> represents a hydroxy-protecting group; followed by removal of the hydroxy-protecting group R<sup>x</sup>.

10

17. A process to prepare a compound as claimed in any one of Claims 1 to 9 which comprises oxidizing a compound of formula (XVII):



(XVII)

15

wherein Z and R<sup>1</sup> are as defined in Claim 1, and R<sup>z</sup> represents C<sub>1-6</sub> alkyl; followed by cleavage of the R<sup>z</sup> moiety.